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DEATH

ÉMILE ZOLA



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By
EMILE ZOLA

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THE comte de Verteuil is fifty-five years old. He belongs to one of the most notable families of France, and is the owner of a great fortune. Being out of sympathy with the government, he has busied himself as he could; has written articles for serious magazines, which have secured for him the entrée to the Academy of moral and political sciences. He has plunged into business, has been successively enthusiastic over agriculture stock farming, and the fine arts. At one time he was even deputy, and distinguished himself by the vehemence of his opposition.

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The comtesse Mathilde de Verteuil is forty-six. She is still referred to as the most adorable blonde in Paris. Age seems to whiten her skin. She was formerly somewhat thin; now her shoulders, in maturing, have taken on the roundness of a silky fruit. Never was she more beautiful. When she enters a drawing-room, with her golden hair and the satin of her throat, she is like a star in its rising; and women of twenty envy her.

The household of the count and countess is one of those that people do not discuss. They married as people in their world oftenest do marry. Some will even assure you that they lived very well together for six years. At that time they had a son, Roger, who is a lieutenant, and a daughter, Blanche, whom they married off last year to M. de Bussac, receiver of petitions. Their

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chief common interest is their children. During the years since they broke with one another, they have remained good friends, with a great fund of egotism. They consult together, treat each other with perfect good taste before the world, but shut themselves up afterwards in their own apartments, where they receive their intimate friends as they please.

But, one night, Mathilde comes home from a ball toward two o'clock in the morning. Her maid undresses her; then, just as she is about to go out, says,—

——“Monsieur le comte is not very well this evening.”

The countess, half asleep, lazily turns her head.

——“Ah!” she murmurs.

She stretches herself, then adds,—

——“Wake me to-morrow at ten; I am expecting the dressmaker.”

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The following day, at breakfast, as the count does not appear, the countess first sends for news of him. The next instant she makes up her mind to go to him. She finds him in bed, very pale and very ceremonious. Three physicians have been there already, have talked together in an undertone, and left prescriptions; they are to return in the evening. The sick man is cared for by two servants, who move about the room, grave and mute, muffling the noise of their heels on the carpet. The large chamber lies silent in cold severity; not a towel is lying about, not a piece of furniture is out of its place. It is proper and dignified sickness, orderly sickness, that expects calls.

“Are you in pain, my dear?” asks the countess, as she comes into the room.

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The count makes an effort to smile.

——“Oh! a little tired,” he answers. All I need is rest. . . . I thank you for putting yourself out to come.”

Two days pass. The chamber remains dignified; everything is in its place, the medicines disappear without leaving a spot on the furniture. The servants' close-shaven faces do not even permit themselves to express a touch of boredom. Yet the count knows that he is in danger of death; he has insisted upon the truth from his doctors, and lets them do their will, without a protest. Most of the time he lies there with closed eyes, or perhaps looks steadily before him, as if thinking of his solitude.

To their friends the countess says that her husband is very ill. Yet she does not change her habits, but eats and sleeps and goes out as usual. Every morning and

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every evening she comes herself to ask the count how he is.

——“Well? are you better, my dear?”

——“Yes, much better, thank you, my dear Mathilde.”

——“If you wished, I would stay with you.”

——“No, that is useless. Julien and Francois do very well. . . . What is the use of tiring you?”

Between them, they understand each other; they have lived apart, and expect to die apart. The count has that bitter, selfish satisfaction of the egoist, who wishes to die alone, without having around his bed the comedies of grief. He cuts short as far as possible, for himself and the countess, the unpleasantness of the last interview. His last will is to go with propriety, as a man of the world who means to trouble and disgust no one.

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Yet, one evening, he has no breath left; he knows that he will not live through the night. Then, as the countess comes up to pay her usual visit, he says to her, calling up a last smile,—

——“Do not go. . . . I do not feel well.”

He wishes to spare her the world's gossip. She, on her part, expected this request of him; and she takes her place in the room. The physicians do not leave the dying man. The two servants finish their duty with the same silent punctiliousness. The children, Roger and Blanche, have been sent for, and are at the bedside with their mother. Other relatives are in an adjoining room. The night passes so, in solemn waiting. In the morning the last sacraments are administered, the count receives communion in the presence of all, to give a last testimony to religion. The ceremony is over; he can die.

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But he is in no haste; he seems to regain his strength, so as to avoid a convulsive and clamorous death. His breathing, in the large, severe room, gives forth only the broken sound of a clock out of order. It is a well-bred man who is passing away; and, when he has kissed his wife and children, he pushes them from him with a movement of his arm; he falls against the wall, and dies alone.

Then one of the physicians bends over him, closes the dead man's eyes. He says in an undertone,—

——“It is all over.”

Sighs and tears rise amid the stillness. The countess, Roger, and Blanche are on their knees. They weep between their clasped hands; no one sees their faces. Then the two children lead away their mother, who, at the door, sways her body in one last

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sob, to emphasize her despair; and, from this moment, the dead man belongs to the pomp of his obsequies.

The physicians have gone, rounding their shoulders, and assuming an expression of vague regret. The parish priest is sent for, to wake with the body. The two servants stay with this priest, seated on chairs, stiff and dignified; it is the expected end of their service. One of them sees a spoon that has been left on a table; he gets up, and slips it quickly into his pocket, that the fine orderliness of the room may not be disturbed.

In the room below, the great drawing-room, a noise of hammering is heard; the upholsterers are getting it ready for the dead man to lie in state. The whole day is taken up with the embalming; the doors are closed, the embalmer is alone with his assistants. When they bring the count down-

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stairs, next day, and he lies in state, he is in evening dress, he has the freshness of youth.

At nine o'clock on the morning of the funeral, the house begins to fill with the murmur of voices. The son and son-in-law of the deceased receive the crowd in a parlor on the ground floor; they bow, they preserve the mute politeness of sorrowing people. All the notabilities are there; the nobility, the army, the magistracy; there are even senators and members of the Institute.

Finally, at ten o'clock, the procession sets out for the church. The hearse is an elegant vehicle, adorned with plumes, draped in silver-fringed hangings. The pallbearers are a marshal of France, a duke, an old friend of the deceased, an ex-minister, and an academician. Roger de Verteuil and M. de Bussac lead the mourning. Next

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comes the procession, a crowd of people in black gloves and cravats, all of them personages of importance, choking in the dust, and walking with the dull tread of a dispersed flock of sheep.

The whole neighborhood is at the windows; people stand in rows on the sidewalks, raise their hats, and watch the triumphal hearse pass by, with a shake of the head. Traffic is interrupted by the endless line of mourning coaches, almost all empty; omnibuses and cabs are blocked up in the cross streets; you hear the coachmen's oaths and the crack of whips. And, all this time, the comtesse de Verteuil is at home, shut up in her room, having given out that her tears have overcome her. Stretched out on a lounge, playing with the tassel of her girdle, she looks at the ceiling, relieved and pensive.

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At the church the ceremony lasts nearly two hours. All the clergy is excited, ever since early morning, you could see nothing but priests running busily about in surplices, giving orders, mopping their foreheads, blowing their noses with resounding blasts. In the middle of the nave, hung with black, a coffin is flaming with candles. At last, the cortege has been shown to its seats, the women on the left, the men on the right; the organ rolls out its lamentations, the choristers drone heavily, the choir boys give shrill sobs; while, in the torches green flames burn high, adding their funeral pallor to the pomp of the ceremony.

“Isn’t Faure to sing?” asks a deputy of his neighbor.

——“Yes, I think so,” answers the neighbor, a resplendent individual, given to smiling at the ladies across the aisle.

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And, as the singer's voice rises in the vibrating nave,—

“Ah! what a method, what breadth of style!” he goes on in an undertone, nodding his head in ecstasy.

All present are carried away. The ladies think of their evenings at the Opera. This Faure surely has talent! A friend of the deceased goes so far as to say,—

——“He never sang better! . . . It's a pity poor Verteuil can't hear him, he who loved to hear him so much!”

The choristers, in black copes, walk round the coffin. The priests, twenty in number, complicate the ceremonial, make genuflections, wave their holy-water sprinklers. At last, the mourners themselves file before the casket, the sprinklers are handed round. And they go out, after shaking hands with the family. Outside, the broad daylight blinds the crowd.

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It is a fine June day. Filmy threads wave in the hot air. Then before the church, in the little square, there is jostling. The procession takes long in re-forming. Those who do not care to go farther, vanish. Over two hundred yards off, at the end of the street, you already see the plumes of the hearse nodding and losing themselves in the distance, while the square is still all blocked up with carriages. You hear the slamming of the carriage doors and the brisk trot of the horses on the paving. Yet the coachmen fall into line, the procession wends its way to the cemetery.

The people in the carriages lie back at their ease; you might imagine them to be going to the Bois, slowly, in the Paris spring weather. As the hearse is no longer in sight, the burial is soon forgotten; and conversations are started, the ladies talk

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of the summer season, the men chat about their business.

"Tell me, my dear, are you going to Dieppe again this year?"

"Yes, perhaps. But it will not be till August. . . . We go on Saturday to our place in the Loire."

"Come now, my dear fellow, he did intercept the letter, and they fought! Oh! very mildly; a mere scratch. . . . In the evening, I dined with him at the club. He even won twenty-five louis from me."

"I say, isn't the meeting of stockholders for day after to-morrow? . . . They want to put me on the committee. I'm so busy that I don't know that I shall be able. . . ."

A minute ago, the procession turned into an avenue. A cool shade falls from the trees, and the gay flashes of sunshine sing gleefully amid the foliage. Suddenly, a

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giddy lady leans out of a carriage window, and exclaims,—

“Really! it’s enchanting out here!”

Just at this point the procession turns into the Montparnasse cemetery. Voices are hushed, nothing is heard save the wheels grinding on the gravel of the avenues. They have to go all the way to the end; the Ver-teuils’ lot is at the last turn, on the left,—a large tomb of white marble, a sort of chapel, highly adorned with sculpture. The casket is set down before the door of this chapel, and the speeches begin.

There are four. The ex-minister recalls the political life of the deceased, whom he represents to have been a modest genius, who would have served his country, had he not dispised intrigue. Next, a friend speaks of the private virtues of him whom the whole world mourns. Then an un-

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known gentleman addresses the assembled crowd as delegate of an industrial society of which the comte de Verteuil was honorary president. Lastly a little gray-haired man expresses the regrets of the Academy of moral and political sciences.

Meanwhile, those present are taking an interest in the surrounding tombs, read the inscriptions on the marble slabs. Those who listen hard catch only a word, here and there. An old man with pursed-up lips, after catching these fragments of sentences, “. . . the high qualities of heart, the generosity and benevolence of a great character . . .” mutters, with a jerk of his chin,—

“Ah, indeed! yes, I knew him, he was an arrant dog!”

The last farewell dies away into the air. When the priests have blest the body, the people withdraw, and no one is left in that

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sequestered nook but the gravediggers, who are letting down the casket into the grave. The cords run out with a dull, scraping sound, the oak casket creaks. Monsieur le comte de Verteuil has gone to his own place.

And the countess, on her lounge, has not stirred. She is still playing with the tassel of her girdle, her eyes on the ceiling, lost in a revery which, little by little, brings a blush to the cheeks of the beautiful blonde.

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II

Madame Guérard is a widow. Her husband, whom she lost eight years ago, was a magistrate. She belongs to the upper middle class, and has a fortune of two millions. She has three children, three sons, who, at their father's death, inherited five hundred thousand francs apiece. But these sons have grown up like black sheep in this austere, cold, and prim family, with appetites and queer propensities that came no

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one knows whence. They ran through their five hundred thousand francs in a few years. The eldest, Charles, had a passion for mechanics, and squandered insane sums on extraordinary inventions. The second, Georges, let himself be led astray by women. The third, Maurice, was swindled by a friend, with whom he undertook to build a theatre. To-day the three sons are dependent on their mother, who is willing to feed and lodge them, but prudently keeps the cupboard keys on her own person.

All these people live in a large apartment in the rue de Turenne, in the Marais. Madame Guérard is sixty years old. With age have come fixed ideas. She demands, in her home, the quiet and good order of a cloister. She is miserly, counts the lumps of sugar, locks up the half-emptied bottles herself, gives out the linen and crockery

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one piece at a time, according to the needs of the household. No doubt, her sons are very fond of her, and she has maintained absolute authority over them, in spite of their thirty years and their follies. But, when she finds herself alone with these three big devils, she feels an undercurrent of anxiety, she is always afraid they will ask her for money, and does not quite know how to refuse them. For this reason, she has taken care to invest her fortune in real estate; she owns three houses in Paris, and some land in the direction of Vincennes. These pieces of property give her the greatest trouble; only, her mind is at rest, she finds excuses for not giving large sums at a time.

Charles, Georges, and Maurice, however, get as much out of the house as they can. They settle themselves there, quarreling

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over every morsel, each one finding fault with great demands. Their mother's death will make them rich again; they know it, and find it a sufficient pretext for waiting and doing nothing. Although they never speak of it, their constant effort is to find out how the division of property will fall. If they cannot come to an agreement, everything will have to be sold, which is always a ruinous operation. And they let their mind dwell on these matters, without any evil longing, solely because it is well to foresee everything. They are cheery, good-natured fellows, of average honesty; like everybody, they hope their mother will live as long as possible. They do not fret. They are waiting, that is all.

One evening, on getting up from table, madame Guérard is taken ill. Her sons make her go to bed, and leave her with the

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chambermaid, on her assuring them that she is better, that she has only a severe headache. But next day the old lady has grown worse; the family physician, being uneasy about her, asks for a consultation. Madame Guérard is in great danger. Then, for a week, a drama is played by the dying woman's bedside.

Her first care, when she saw herself confined to her room by sickness, was to have all the keys given her, and to hide them under her pillow. She still tries to rule from her bed, to protect her cupboards against waste. Struggles go on within her, doubts distress her. She makes up her mind only after long hesitations. Her three sons are there, and she studies them with her dim eyes, she waits for a happy inspiration.

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One day she has confidence in Georges. She makes a sign for him to approach, saying in an undertone,

“Here, here is the key to the sideboard; take the sugar. . . . You will lock it up safe again, and bring me back the key.”

Another day she distrusts Georges, she follows him about with her eye as soon as he stirs, as if she were afraid of seeing him slip the knickknacks on the mantelpiece into his pockets. She calls Charles, intrusts him with a key in his turn, whispering,

“The chambermaid will go with you. You will see that she takes out some sheets, and will lock up, yourself.”

In her last agony, this is her torture,—no longer to be able to watch over the household expenses. She recalls her children’s follies, she knows them to be lazy, large

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eaters, foolish, open-handed. She has long since lost all respect for them, who have realized none of her dreams, who disturb her habits of economy and plainness. Her affection alone survives and forgives. In the depths of her entreating eyes can be read that she begs them to be so good as to wait till she is no longer there, before emptying her drawers and dividing her goods. This division before her very eyes would be a torture to her expiring avarice.

Meanwhile, Charles, Georges, and Maurice show themselves very kind to her. They arrange that one of them shall always be with their mother. A sincere affection appears in their least attentions. But, inevitably, they bring with them the thoughtlessness of out of doors, the smell of the cigar they have just smoked, their interest in the news of the town. The sick woman's ego-

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ism suffers at her not being all in all to her children in her last hour. Then, when she grows weaker, her doubts cause an increasing embarrassment between the young men and herself. If they were not thinking of the fortune they are to inherit, she would put the thought of this money into their heads by the way she guards it up to her last breath. She looks at them with so keen an eye, in such evident fear, that they turn away their heads. Then she thinks they are standing as spies at her deathbed; and, in truth, they do think of it, they are continually brought back to the idea by the mute questioning of her looks. It is she who awakens cupidity in them. When she catches one of them looking thoughtful, his face pale, she says to him,

“Come here to me. . . . What are you thinking of?”

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——“Nothing, mother.”

But he started. She shakes her head slowly and adds,

“I give you a great deal of care, my children. Come, don’t worry. I shall soon be here no more.”

They surround her, they swear they love her and will save her. She answers no, with an obstinate shake of her head; she goes yet farther, in her distrust. It is a frightful death, poisoned by money.

The sickness last three weeks. There have already been five consultations; the greatest medical celebrities have been called in. The chambermaid helps madame’s sons take care of her; and, in spite of all precautions, a little disorder has found its way into the room. All hope is lost, the physician announces that from one hour to another the patient is likely to yield.

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So, one morning that her sons think her asleep, they are standing near a window, talking among themselves about a difficulty that has come up. It is the 15th of July; she was in the habit of collecting the rent of her houses herself, and they are in a quandary, not knowing how to get hold of this money. The janitors have already asked for orders. In her weak condition, they cannot talk business with her. Yet, if an accident were to occur, they would need the rents to defray certain personal expenses.

“Good heavens!” says Charles in a low voice, “I’ll go if you wish, and call upon the tenants. . . . They will understand the situation, they will pay.”

But Georges and Maurice have little faith in this plan. They, too, have grown suspicious.

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“We might go with you,” says the former.
“All three of us will have expenses to meet.”

“Well! I will bring you the money. . . .
You don’t think me capable of keeping it,
surely!”

“No; but it would be just as well for us
to be together. It will be more regular.”

And they look at one another with eyes
in which already glisten the anger and ill-
will of sharing. The succession is open;
each one wants to secure the largest share
for himself. Charles suddenly goes on, car-
rying out aloud the idea that his brothers
are thinking to themselves,—

“Listen: we will sell; that will be best. . .
If we quarrel to-day, we shall fairly eat
each other up to-morrow.”

But a rattling in the sick woman’s throat
makes them turn their heads quickly. Their
mother has risen up in bed, white, with

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haggard eyes, her body shaken with a fit of trembling. She has heard, she stretches out her thin arms, she repeats in a despairing voice,

——“My children. . . . My children. . . .”

And a spasm throws her back upon her pillow; she dies with the atrocious thought in her mind that her sons are robbing her.

All three terrified, have fallen upon their knees by the bedside. They kiss the hands of the dead, they close her eyes with sobs. At this moment, their childhood returns once more to their hearts, and they are nothing but orphans. But this frightful death remains in the depths of their being, as a remorse and as a hate.

The toilette of the dead woman is attended to by the chambermaid. A sister of charity is sent for to watch with the body. Meanwhile, the sons are running on er-

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rands; they go and make their declaration of the decease, order the engraved announcements to relatives and friends, arrange for the funeral ceremony. At night they relieve one another, and watch with the sister. In the room, the curtains of which are drawn, the dead woman rests stretched out on the bed, her head rigid, her hands crossed, a silver crucifix on her breast. Beside her, a taper burns. A sprig of box hangs over the rim of a vase filled with holy-water. And the watch ends in the chill of the morning. The sister asks for some warm milk, because she does not feel well.

An hour before the funeral, the staircase is filled with people. The porte-cochere is hung with black drapery with a silver fringe. There the coffin is exposed, as in the depths of a narrow chapel, surrounded

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with candles, covered with wreaths and bouquets. Every one who enters takes a sprinkler from the holy-water basin at the foot of the bier, and besprinkles the body. At eleven o'clock the funeral procession sets out. The sons of the deceased lead the mourners. Behind them you recognize magistrates, some large manufacturers, quite solemn and pompous bourgeoisie, keeping step as they walk, casting side glances at the inquisitive crowd drawn up along the sidewalks. There are, at the end of the procession, twelve mourning coaches. People count them; they are much commented on in the neighborhood.

Meanwhile, those present are filled with pity for Charles, Georges, and Maurice, in dress coats, gloved in black, walking behind the coffin, their heads bowed down, their faces reddened with tears. For the

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rest, there is but one exclamation,—they are burying their mother in very proper fashion. The hearse is of the third class; it is calculated that they will be in for several thousand francs. An old notary says with a shrewd smile,—

——“If madame Guérard had paid for her funeral herself, she would have saved on six carriages.”

At the church, the portal is draped, the organ plays, the absolution is given by the parish curé. Then, when the congregation have filed past the body, they find the three sons drawn up in a single line at the entrance of the nave, stationed there to shake hands with those present who are unable to go to the cemetery. For ten minutes they hold out their arms, press hands without even recognizing people, biting their lips, holding back their tears; and it is a

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great relief to them when the church is empty, and they resume their slow march behind the hearse.

The Guérards' family vault is in the cemetery of Pere-Lachaise. Many go on foot, others get into the mourning coaches. The procession crosses the place de la Bastille, and follows the rue de la Roquette. The passers-by raise their eyes and take off their hats. It is a rich funeral, at which the workmen of that quarter gaze, as it passes, while they eat their sausages and bread.

Arrived at the cemetery, the procession turns to the left, and at once finds itself in front of the tomb, in the shape of a Gothic chapel, bearing on its pediment these words, cut in black,—*Famille Guérard*. The ornamented iron door, thrown wide open, discloses an altar table, on which

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candles burn. Around the monument are rows of other structures, of the same sort, forming actual streets; it looks like a cabinet-maker's shop front, with wardrobes, chests of drawers, secretaries, newly finished and arranged in symmetrical rows in the show window. The people present are much interested, impressed by this architecture, looking around for a little shade under the trees of the neighboring avenue. One lady steps aside to admire a superb rose-bush, growing like a bouquet of fragrant blossoms over a gravestone.

Meanwhile, the coffin has been let down. A priest says the last prayers, while the gravediggers, in blue uniforms, are waiting a few steps off. The three sons sob, their eyes fixed on the gaping vault, the slab of which has been removed; there, in this cool shade, they, in their turn, will one day come to sleep. Some friends lead them away, when the gravediggers come up.

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And, two days later, in the office of their mother's lawyer, they are disputing, with set teeth, dry eyes, and the passion of enemies who are determined not to give in on a single penny. It would be for their interest to wait, not to hurry on the sale of the property. But they cast their bald truths in each others' teeth: Charles would run through it all with his inventions; Georges must have some girl to fleece him; Maurice is surely engaged in another wild-cat speculation that would swallow up their whole capital. In vain, the notary tries to induce them to come to an amicable understanding. They separate, threatening one another.

It is the dead woman awakening in them once more, with her avarice and her terror of being robbed. When money poisons death, from death comes nothing but wrath. There is fighting over coffins.

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III

M. Rousseau, at twenty, married an orphan, Adele Lemercier, who was eighteen. Between them, they had seventy francs for setting up housekeeping. At first they sold notepaper and sticks of sealing wax under a doorway. Next, they hired a hole, a shop as large as your hand, where they stayed ten years, adding to their business little by little. Now they keep a stationery shop in the rue de Clichy, worth fully fifty thousand francs.

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Adele has not very good health. She has always coughed a little. The close air of the shop, the sedentary life behind the counter, are not good for her. A physician whom they consulted has recommended rest and walks out of doors in fine weather. But prescriptions of that sort cannot be followed. when you are bent upon piling up a small income quickly, to live on it in peace. Adele says she will rest and take walks later, after they have sold out and retired to the provinces.

As for M. Rosseau, he is anxious, to be sure, on days when he sees her pale, with red spots on her cheeks. Only he has his stationery business to absorb him, he cannot always be at her elbow to prevent her from being imprudent. During some weeks he cannot find a minute to speak to her about her health. Then, if he happens to hear

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her little dry cough, he scolds her, he makes her put on her shawl and take a walk with him in the Champs-Élysées. But she comes back more tired, coughing harder; the bustle of business once more takes hold of M. Rousseau; the sickness is again forgotten till another crisis comes. It is the way in business: you die without having time to take care of yourself.

One day, M. Rousseau takes the physician aside, and asks him to tell him frankly if his wife is in danger. The physician begins by saying that one must trust to nature, that he has seen many much sicker people pull through. Then, pressed with questions, he confesses that madame Rousseau has consumption, even in a pretty advanced stage. The husband turns pale at this avowal. He loves Adele for their long struggle together before they had white

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bread to eat every day. He has in her not only a wife, but a partner, whose activity and intelligence he knows. If he loses her, he will be stricken at once in his affection and in his business. However, he must have courage, he cannot shut up his shop, to weep at leisure. So he shows nothing, he tries not to frighten Adele by letting her see him with red eyes. He resumes his jog-trot life. By the end of a month, whenever he thinks of these sad things, he persuades himself that doctors are often mistaken. His wife does not seem any worse. And so it comes about that he sees her die slowly, without suffering too much himself, his mind taken up with his business, expecting a catastrophe, but mentally postponing it to a vague future.

Sometimes Adele repeats,—

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——“Ah! when we get into the country, you will see how well I shall be. . . . Good Lord! we have only eight years to wait now. The time will go quickly.”

And M. Rousseau does not remember that they might retire at once, on smaller savings. To begin with, Adele would not agree to it. When you have set your heart on a certain sum, you must reach it.

Nevertheless, madame Rousseau has had to take to her bed twice already. She has got up from it again, and come down to the counter. The neighbors say, “There is a little woman who won’t last long;” and they are not mistaken. Just at the time for taking the inventory she takes to her bed for the third time. The doctor comes in the morning, talks with her, signs a prescription absent-mindedly. M. Rousseau is warned, and knows that the fatal catas-

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trophe is drawing near. But taking account of stock keeps him down-stairs in the shop, and he can scarcely escape for five minutes, from time to time. He goes up, when the physician is there; then he leaves the room with him, and reappears for a moment before breakfast; he goes to bed at eleven in a little closet, where he has put a folding bed. Francoise, the maid, tends the sick woman. A terrible girl, this Francoise, from Auvergne, with great awkward hands, and of dubious civility and cleanliness! She is rough with the dying woman, brings her her medicine scowling, makes an intolerable noise sweeping the room, which she leaves in great disorder; phials, all sticky, lie about on the chest of drawers, the washbasins are never washed, dust-cloths hang over the backs of chairs; you don't know where to set your foot, so

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littered up is the floor. Yet madame Rousseau does not complain, and is content to rap on the wall with her fist, to call the maid, when the latter does not answer. Francoise has other work to do beside taking care of her; she has to keep the shop clean, do the cooking for master and clerks, not to mention errands in the neighborhood and other odd jobs. So that madame cannot require her to be always by her side. She is cared for when there is time.

Besides, even in bed, Adele thinks of business. She follows the sales; asks every evening how things are getting on. The inventory makes her anxious. When her husband can come up to her room for a few minutes, she never speaks to him about her health; she asks him solely about the probable net profit. She is much chagrined at learning that the year is only middling,

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fourteen hundred francs behind last year. While burning with fever on her pillow, she still remembers the last week's orders; she sets the accounts straight; she manages the house. And it is she who sends her husband away, if he forgets himself in her room. His being there will not cure her, and it is bad for the business. She is sure the clerks are staring at the passers-by, and she keeps repeating,—

——“Go down, dear; I want nothing, I assure you. And don't forget to lay in a stock of copybooks; because the schools open soon, and we are short of them.”

For a long while she tries to ignore her real condition. She always hopes to get up next day, and take her place at the counter again. She even makes plans: if she can leave the house soon, they will go and spend a Sunday at Saint-Cloud. Never

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has she had such a longing to see the trees. Then, of a sudden, one morning, she grows serious. In the night, all alone, open-eyed, she has realized that she is going to die. She says nothing till evening, lying there thinking, her eyes on the ceiling; and in the evening, she detains her husband, she talks quietly, as if she were submitting a bill to him.

"Listen," she says, "you will go to-morrow and get a notary. There is one near here, in the rue Saint-Lazare."

"Why a notary?" cries M. Rosseau; "we surely haven't come to that!"

But she goes on in her calm, matter-of-fact way,—

"May be! Only it will make me feel easier to know that our affairs are in order. . . . We married, when neither of us had anything, on the plan of holding all

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our property in common. Now that we have made a little money, I don't want my family to be able to plunder you. . . . My sister Agathe isn't so nice that I need leave her anything. I would sooner take all with me."

And she sticks to it obstinately; her husband must go to-morrow and get the notary. She questions the latter at length, bent upon having all due precautions taken that the will shall not be contested. When the will is drawn up and the lawyer gone, she stretches herself, murmuring,—

——“Now I shall die content. . . . I have well earned a trip into the country; I can't say I am not sorry to give up going to the country. But you'll go. . . . Promise me, when you retire, to go to the place we picked out; you know, the village where your mother was born, near Melun. . . . It will give me pleasure.”

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M. Rousseau weeps bitterly. She comforts him; she gives him good advice, it will be proper for him to marry again; only he must choose a woman of a certain age, because young girls, who marry widowers, marry their money. And she points out a lady of their acquaintance, with whom she would be happy to know that he had made a match.

Then, that very night, she has a frightful death-struggle. She is stifling, asks for air. Francoise is asleep in a chair. M. Rousseau, standing at the head of her bed, can only take the dying woman's hand and press it, to tell her he is there, that he will not leave her. In the morning, she falls into a profound calm; she is very white, with her eyes closed, breathing slowly. Her husband thinks he can go down with Francoise to open the shop. When he comes up

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again, he finds his wife still very white, stiffened in the same posture; only her eyes are open. She is dead.

M. Rousseau has been to long expecting to lose her. He does not weep, he is simply crushed and tired out. He goes down again sees Francoise put up the shop shutters; and, with his own hand, writes on a sheet of paper, "*Closed on account of death;*" then he sticks this sheet on to the middle shutter with four wafers. Up-stairs, the whole morning is taken up with cleaning and putting the room to rights. Francoise passes a cloth over the floor, takes away the phials, puts a lighted taper and a cup of holy-water near the dead woman; for Adele's sister is expected, that Agathe who has the tongue of a serpent, and the maid does not want anybody to be able to accuse her of bad housekeeping. M. Rous-

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seau has sent a clerk to go through with the necessary formalities. He himself goes to the church and discusses at length the funeral expenses. His being in affliction is no reason why he should be cheated. He loved his wife well, and, if she can see him now, he is sure she is pleased at his bargaining with the curés and undertaker's men. Still, for the sake of the neighborhood, he wishes to have a proper burial. At last, he strikes a bargain: he will give a hundred and sixty francs to the church, and three hundred francs to the undertaker. He calculates that, with the minor expenses, he will not get through with less than five hundred francs.

When M. Rousseau comes home, he sees Agathe, his sister-in-law, installed by the dead woman's side. Agathe is a tall, lean woman, with red eyes and thin, bluish lips.

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The couple quarrelled with her three years ago, and have seen nothing of her since. She rises ceremoniously, then kisses her brother-in-law. In the presence of death, all quarrels are made up. Then M. Rousseau, who could not cry this morning, sobs, finding his poor wife white and stiff, her nose still more pinched, her face so shrunk-en that he hardly recognizes her. Agathe remains dry-eyed. She has taken the best arm-chair, she casts her eyes slowly over the room, as if making a detailed inventory of the furniture. As yet, she has not brought up the question of her interests; but it is obvious that she is very anxious, and is wondering whether there is a will.

On the morning of the funeral, at the moment when the body is to be placed upon the bier, it appears that the undertaker has made a mistake, and sent too short a cof-

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fin. His men have to go for another. Meanwhile, the hearse is waiting at the door, the neighborhood is all agog. This is a fresh torment to M. Rousseau. If it could bring his wife back to life again, to keep her so long, it might be. . . . ! At last, poor madame Rousseau is brought down, and the coffin exposed only ten minutes below, in the doorway hung with black. A hundred people, or so, are waiting in the street,—tradespeople of the neighborhood, tenants in the house, friends of the household, a few workmen in overcoats. The procession starts; M. Rousseau leads the mourning.

And, as the funeral passes, the neighbors cross themselves rapidly, speaking under their breath. It's the stationer's wife, isn't it? that little yellow woman who was nothing but skin and bones. Ah! well! she will be better off underground! But that is the

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way with well-to-do business people, working to enjoy themselves in their old age! She's going to enjoy herself now, the stationer's wife is! And the neighbors' wives are of the opinion that M. Rousseau is doing things in very proper fashion, because he walks behind the hearse, bareheaded, all alone, pale, and his scant hair flying in the wind.

At the church, the priests hurry over the ceremony in forty minutes. Agathe, who has taken a seat in the front row, seems to be counting the lighted candles. No doubt, she is thinking that her brother-in-law might have done things with less ostentation; for, after all, if there is no will, and she inherits half the property, she will have to pay her share toward the funeral. The priests say a last prayer, pass the holy-water sprinkler from hand to hand, and go

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out. Almost every one goes. The three mourning coaches drive up, and the ladies get into them. Behind the hearse, only M. Rousseau is left, still bareheaded, and thirty others, or so, friends who do not dare to slink away. The hearse is hung simply with black drapery fringed with white. The passers-by raise their hats, and pass on quickly.

As M. Rousseau has no family tomb, he has merely got a five years' lease at the Montmartre cemetery, promising himself to buy a perpetual grant later, when he will exhume his wife, to settle her in her home forever.

The hearse stops at the end of the avenue, and the coffin is carried by hand among the low tombstones, to a grave dug in the soft earth. Those present shuffle their feet in silence. Then the priest withdraws, after mumbling twenty words between his teeth. On every hand lie little gardens, closed by

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iron-work gates, graves decked with carnations, and green trees; the white slabs, in the midst of this verdure, look quite new and gay. M. Rousseau is very much taken with one monument, a slender column surmounted by the symbolic urn. That morning a stonecutter had come to bother him with plans; and he thinks of how, when he buys his perpetual grant, he will have just such a column, with that pretty vase, put over his wife's tombstone.

But Agathe leads him away, and, when they have got back to the shop, decides at last to speak about her interests. When she learns that there is a will, she draws herself up stiffly and goes, slamming the door. Never will she set foot again in that shanty. M. Rousseau has still, at moments, a great sorrow that chokes him; but what, stupifies him, above all else, makes his head feel empty and his limbs restless, is that the shop is shut, on a week-day.

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IV

January has been hard. No work, no bread, and no fire in the house. The Morisseaus have almost died of want. The wife is a washerwoman; the husband, a mason. They live at the Batignolles, in the rue Cardinet, in a dark house that spreads pestilence through the neighborhood. Their room, on the fifth floor, is so dilapidated that the rain comes in through the cracks in the ceiling; but still they would not complain, if their little Charlot, a boy of ten, did not need good food to make a man of him.

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The child is puny, a mere nothing lays him up. When he went to school, if he worked hard, trying to learn everything all at once, he would come home sick. Very intelligent withal, and nice little toad, talking beyond his years. On days when they have no bread to give him, his parents cry like fools. The more so that children are dying off like flies, from the top to the bottom of the house, so unsanitary is it .

There is ice to be broken in the streets. Indeed the father has succeeded in getting a job; he clears the gutters with a pickaxe, and in the evening brings home forty sous. While waiting for his house-building work to begin again, it is always something not to starve.

But, one day, the man comes home to find Charlot in bed. His mother doesn't know what ails him. She had sent him to Cour-

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celles, to his aunt's, who deals in second-hand clothes, to see if he could not get a jacket that would be warmer than his cotton blouse, in which he shivers. His aunt had only two old overcoats, both of them too big, and the little fellow had come home all of a tremble, with a drunken air, as if he had been drinking. Now he is very red on his pillow, he talks nonsense, he thinks he is playing marbles, and is singing songs.

His mother has hung a tattered piece of a shawl in front of the window, to stop up a broken pane; at the top, there are only two panes left free, which let in the livid gray of the sky. Want has emptied the chest of drawers, all the linen is at the pawnbroker's. One evening they sold a table and two chairs. Charlot used to sleep on the floor; but since he fell sick, they have given him the bed, and even there he

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is still badly off, for the wool in the mattress has been taken, handful by handful, half a pound at a time, to a second-hand dealer, for four or five sous. Now the father and mother sleep in a corner, on a straw mattress that a dog would not have.

Meanwhile, both look at Charlot tossing about in the bed. What on earth ails the kid, to make him so queer in the head? Like enough, some beast has bitten him, or else he has been given something bad to drink. A neighbor, madame Bonnet, comes in; and, after looking at the boy, says it is chills and fever. She knows all about it, she lost her husband by just such a sickness.

The mother weeps, pressing Charlot in her arms. The father goes out like a madman, and runs for a doctor. He brings one back, very tall and prim looking; he listens

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at the child's back, he taps him on the chest, without saying a word. Then madame Bonnet must go to her room for pencil and paper, so that he can write his prescription. When he goes, still mute, the mother asks him in a choking voice,—

“What is it, sir?”

“Pleurisy,” he answers curtly, without explanation.

Then he asks, in his turn,—

“Are you enrolled at the bureau of charities?”

“No, sir. . . . We were well off last summer. It's the winter that has killed us.”

“So much the worse! so much the worse!”

And he promises to return. Madame Bonnet lends twenty sous, to go the apothecary's. With Morisseau's forty sous they have bought two pounds of beef, some soft

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coal, and candles. This first night passes off well. They keep up the fire. The sick boy, as if put to sleep by the warmth, has stopped talking; his little hands are burning. Seeing him weighed down by the fever, his parents feel easier; and they are stupefied, next day, in fresh terror, when the physician shakes his head by the bedside, with the wry face of a man who has given up all hope.

For five days there is no change. Charlot sleeps, as crushed upon his pillow. In the room the breath of poverty grows stronger, seems to come in with the wind, through the holes in the roofing and window. The second evening, they sold the mother's last chemise; the third, they had to pull out some more handfuls of wool from under the sick boy, to pay the apothecary. Then everything failed them, there was nothing left.

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Morrisseau is still breaking ice; only his forty sous are not enough. As this severe cold may kill Charlot, he longs for a thaw, even though he dreads it. When he goes off to work, he is glad to see the streets white; then he thinks of the little boy dying up there, and fervently prays for a ray of sunshine, a bit of spring warmth, to sweep away the snow. If they only had put their name down at the bureau of charities, they would have the doctor and medicines for nothing. The mother has been to the city hall; they answered her that there were too many applications, she must wait. Still, she got some bread tickets; a benovolent lady gave her five francs. Then destitution began once more.

The fifth day, Morisseau brings home his last forty sous. The thaw has come; he has been discharged. Then all is over: the

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stove stays cold, there is no bread, no more prescriptions are taken to the apothecary's. In the room, trickling with dampness, the father and mother shiver opposite the little dying boy. Madame Bonnet does not come to see them any more, because she has a tender heart, and it grieves her too much. The people of the house hurry quickly past their door. At times,, the mother, in a fit of tears, throws herself upon the bed, kisses the child, as if to relieve his suffering and cure him. The father, stupified, stays at the window for hours, raising the old shawl looking at the thaw running in the gutters, the water dripping in big drops from the roofs, and blackening the street. Perhaps it may do Charlot good.

One morning, the doctor announces that he shall not return. The child is given up.

——“This damp weather has finished him,” he says.

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Morisseau shakes his fist at the sky. So all weathers mean death to poor people! It froze, and that did no good; it thaws, and that is worse still. If his wife would agree, they would light a bushel of charcoal, and all three go together. It would be sooner over.

Yet the mother has gone back to the city hall, the people there have promised to send them aid, and they are waiting. What a frightful day! A black chill falls from the ceiling; one corner is dripping with rain; they have to put a pail there to catch the drops. They have eaten nothing since the day before; the child has only drunk a cup of herb tea that the janitor's wife brought up. The father sits at the table, his head in his hands, in a sort of stupor, with a buzzing in his ears. At every sound of steps, the mother runs to the door, thinks it is at last,

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the promised aid. Six o'clock strikes; nothing has come. The twilight is muddy, slow and ghastly as a death-agony.

Suddenly, in the deepening shadows, Charlot stammers out some confused words,—

——“Mamma . . . mamma . . .”

His mother comes to him, feels a strong breath upon her face. She hears nothing more; she vaguely makes out the child, his head thrown back, his neck stiffened. She shrieks, half crazed, imploring, —

——“Light! quick, some light! . . . My Charlot, speak to me!”

There are no more candles. In her hurry she scratches some matches, breaks them between her fingers. Then, with trembling hands, she feels of the child's face.

——“Oh! my God! he is dead! . . . Say, Morisseau, he is dead!”

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The father raises his head, blinded by the darkness.

——“Well, then! what would you have? He’s dead. . . . It’s better so.”

At the mother’s sobbing, madame Bonnet has made up her mind to come with her lamp. Then, as the two women are making Charlot tidy a knock is heard; it is the aid, come at last; ten francs, some bread tickets, and a bit of meat. Morisseau laughs wildly, saying that they always miss the train at the bureau of charities.

And what a poor child’s corpse, thin, light as a feather! You might have laid a sparrow upon the mattress, killed by the snow and picked up in the street, and it would not have made a smaller heap!

Meanwhile, madame Bonnet, who has grown very obliging again, explains that it will not bring Charlot back to life, to fast

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by his side. She offers to go after some bread and meat, adding that she will also fetch some candles. They let her go. When she comes back, she sets the table with sausages, piping hot; and the Morisseaus, famished as they are, eat ravenously beside the dead body, whose little white face is just visible in the dim light. The stove roars, they are very comfortable. At moments, the mother's eyes grow wet. Great tears drop down upon her bread. How warm Charlot would be! and how he would have liked to eat some sausage!

Madame Bonnet insists upon sitting up with them. About one, when Morisseau has at last fallen asleep, his head resting on the foot of the bed, the two women make some coffee. Another neighbor, a seamstress of eighteen, is asked in; and she brings the remnant of a bottle of brandy,

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so as to stand treat to something. Then the three women sip their coffee, talking in an undertone, telling stories of extraordinary deaths; little by little, their voices are raised, their tittle-tattle takes in a larger field, they chat about the house, about the neighborhood, about a crime committed in the rue Nollet. And, now and then, the mother gets up, goes to take a look at Charlot, as if to make sure that he has not moved.

The declaration not having been made that evening, they have to keep the little body all the next day. They have only one room; they live with Charlot, eat and sleep with him. At moments they forget him; then, when they find him there, it is like losing him over again.

At last, on the third day, the coffin is brought, no bigger than a toy box, four

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boards roughly planed, furnished free of charge by the administration, after verifying their certificate of indigence. And all aboard! they set out for the church on the run. Behind Charlot comes the father, with two comrades he has picked up on the way; then the mother, madame Bonnet, and the other neighbor, the seamstress. These people flounder through the mud up to mid-leg. It does not rain, but the fog is so thick that it drenches their clothes. At the church, the ceremony is hurried through; and they start off again over the muddy pavement.

The cemetery is at the devil, outside the fortifications. They pass down the avenue de Saint-Ouen, through the barrier, and get there at last. It is a vast enclosure, a plot of waste land, shut in by white walls. Weeds grow there; the ground, often dug

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up, is all in humps; while, at the farther end, grow a row of sickly trees, soiling the sky with their black branches.

The funeral moves slowly forward over the soft ground. Now it rains, and they have to wait in the shower for an old priest, who at last makes up his mind to venture forth from a little chapel. Charlot is to sleep at the bottom of the common trench. The field is strewed with crosses overturned by the wind, with wreaths rotted by the rain; a field of wretchedness and mourning, devastated, trampled down, sweating with its overmeasure of dead bodies, heaped up by the hunger and cold of the suburbs.

It is over. The earth is tossed back, Charlot is at the bottom of the hole; and his parents go, without having been able to kneel down in the mud in which they flounder. Outside, as it is still raining, Moris-

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seau, who has three francs left, of the ten francs from the bureau of charities, invites his comrades and the women to take something at a wine shop. They sit down to table, they drink two litres, they eat a piece of Brie cheese. Then the comrades, in their turn, stand two more litres. When the company get back to Paris, they are very gay.

DEATH.

V

Jean-Louis Lacour is seventy. He was born at la Courteille, a village of a hundred and fifty inhabitants, lost in the wilds of the wolf. He has been once in his life to Angers, which is forty-one miles distant; but he was so young that he does not remember it any more. He has three children,—two sons, Antoine and Joseph, and a daughter, Catherine. The last was married; then her husband died, and she returned to her father's with a little boy of

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twelve, Jacquinet. The family lives on five or six acres; just enough land to give them bread, and keep them from going quite naked. When they drink wine, they have sweated for it.

La Courteille is at the end of a valley, with woods on every side, that shut it in and hide it from view. There is no church, the village is too poor. The curé of les Cormiers comes over to say mass; and, as the road is five good miles, he comes only once a fortnight. The houses, about twenty tumbledown shacks, are strung along the highway. Hens scratch on the dunghills before the doors. When a stranger goes by, the women crane their necks, while the children rolling on the ground in the sun, scamper off in the midst of frightened flocks of geese.

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Never has Jean-Louis been sick. He is tall and knotty as an oak. The sun has dried him up, has baked and cracked his skin; he has turned to the color, the roughness, and the tranquility of a tree. In growing old, he has lost his tongue. He has done with speaking, finding it useless. He walks with long, obstinate strides, with the peaceful strength of an ox.

Last year, he still was stronger than his sons; he would keep the hardest jobs for himself, silent in the fields, which seemed to know him and tremble. But one day, two months ago, his limbs gave way all of a sudden, and he lay for two hours across a furrow, like a felled trunk. Next day, he tried to go to work again, but his arms had lost their strength, the soil would no longer obey him. His sons shake their heads. His daughter tries to keep him at home.

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He sticks it out stubbornly, and they have Jacquinet go with him, so that the child can cry out, if his grandfather falls down.

“What are you doing there, lazybones?” asks Jean-Louis of the youngster. “At your age, I was earning my bread.”

“I’m tending you, grandfather,” answers the child.

This gives the old man a shock . He says no more. In the evening, he goes to bed, and does not get up again. When his sons and daughter go to the fields, next day, they step in to take a look at their father, as they do not hear him moving. They find him stretched out on his bed, with open eyes, as if in thought. His skin is so hard and tanned that you can’t even tell the color of his complaint.

“Well, father, out of sorts?”

He gives a grunt, he shakes his head.

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“Then you’re not coming; we’ll go without you?”

Yes, he motions them to go without him. The harvest has begun, every hand is needed. Like enough, if they were to lose a morning, a sudden storm might carry away the sheaves. Even Jacquinet follows his mother and uncles. Old Lacour is left alone. In the evening, when his children come home, he is in the same place, still on his back, with his eyes open and that look of his, as if in thought.

“So, father, you’re no better?”

No, no better. He grunts, he shakes his head. What can they do for him- Catherine suggests putting some wine to boil, with herbs in it; but it is too strong, it all but kills him. Joseph says they will see to-morrow, and they all go to bed.

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The next day, before going to harvest, the sons and daughters stop a minute, standing by his bedside. Decidedly the old man is sick. Never before has he stayed on his back like that. Perhaps they really ought to call in a doctor. The trouble is that they will have to go to Rougemont; a good sixteen miles there and sixteen miles back, that makes thirty-two. They would lose a whole day. The old man, who is listening to his children, fidgets and seems to be getting angry. He doesn't need any doctor; it does no good, and it costs money.

——“You don't want one?” asks Antoine.
“Then we'll get to work?”

Of course they must go to work. They wouldn't make him any better by staying there, would they? The soil needs looking after more than he. And three days pass

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by; the children go to the fields every morning. Jean-Louis does not move, all alone, drinking out of a jug when he is thirsty. He is like one of those old horses that fall down in a corner from weariness, and are left to die. He has worked for sixty years; he may as well go, seeing that he is no longer good for anything, except to take up room and bother people.

His children themselves feel no great sorrow. Tilling the soil has made them resigned to these things; they are too near to it to owe it a grudge for taking the old man. A look at him in the morning, a look in the evening; they can do no more. If their father should pick up again, after all, it would prove that he was mighty stoutly built. If he dies, it will show that he had death in his body; and everybody knows that, when you have death in your body,

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nothing will drive it out; not signs of the cross any more than medicines. A cow, now, you can do something for.

In the evening, Jean-Louis questions his children about the harvest. When he hears them count up the sheaves and congratulate themselves on the fine weather, his eyes sparkle. Once more, they talk of going for the doctor; but the old man loses his temper, and they are afraid of killing him all the sooner if they cross him. He only asks to see the district constable, an old comrade. Old Nicolas is his senior, for he was seventy-five last Candlemas. He is straight as a poplar. He comes and gravely sits down beside Jean-Louis. Jean-Louis, who has lost his tongue, looks at him with his little washed-out eyes. Old Nicolas looks at him, too, having nothing to say. And the two old men sit there, face to face,

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for an hour, without uttering a word, no doubt remembering things far away, in their bygone days. That evening, when his children come home from harvest, they find Jean-Louis dead, stretched out on his back, stiff, and his eyes staring up.

Yes, the old man has died without moving a limb. He has breathed his last straight before him, one breath more in the wide country. Like the beasts that hide themselves and submit, he did not even trouble a neighbor, he did his little business all alone.

——“Father is dead,” says Joseph, calling the others.

And they all, Antoine, Catherine, Jacquinet, repeat,—

——“Father is dead.”

They are not surprised. Jacquinet stretches out his neck in curiosity; the wo-

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man pulls out her handkerchief, the two young men walk about, saying nothing, their grave faces turning paler under their tan. He had lasted pretty well; he was rugged, their old father was! And this thought comforts his children; they are proud of the family ruggedness.

They watch with their father up to eleven, then they all give way to sleep; and Jean-Louis sleeps alone, with his inscrutable face, which seems still to be thinking.

At daybreak, Joseph sets out for les Cormiers, to notify the priest. Meanwhile, as there are still some sheaves to be brought in, Antoine and Catherine go to the fields just the same, leaving the body in Jacquinet's care. The little boy finds the time pass heavily in the old man's company, seeing that he does not even stir; and he goes out, now and then, into the street, throws stones

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at some sparrows, looks on at a pedler spreading out some silk neckerchiefs before two neighbors' wives; then, when he remembers his grandfather, he runs in again, makes sure that he has not moved, and slips out once more, to see two dogs fight.

As the door has been left open, the hens come in, walk round quietly, rummaging on the trodden ground with their bills. A red cock stands erect on his feet, stretches out his neck, rounds his live-coal of an eye, anxious about this body, whose presence there he cannot explain; he is a prudent and sagacious cock, who, no doubt, knows that the old man is not used to lie abed after sunrise; and he ends by crowing his sonorous clarion note, singing the old man's death, while the hens go out again, one by one, clucking and pecking the ground.

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The priest from les Cormiers cannot come till five. Ever since morning, you could hear the cartwright sawing deal boards and driving in nails. Those who do not know the news say, "How? can Jean-Louis be dead!" because the la Courteille folk know those sounds well.

Antoine and Catherine have got back, the harvest is over; they cannot say they are disappointed, for the grain has not been so fine for ten years.

The whole family are waiting for the priest, and they busy themselves, to keep up their patience. Catherine puts the soup on the fire, Joseph draws some water, they send Jacquinet to see if the hole has been dug in the graveyard. At last, but not before six, the curé arrives. He is in a spring tilt-cart, with a young ragamuffin to act as clerk. He gets out at the Lacours' door,

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takes his stole and surplice out of a newspaper; then puts them on saying,—

——“Let us be quick; I must be back by seven.”

But nobody is in a hurry. They have to go for two neighbors, who are to carry the deceased on the old black wood stretcher. As the yare, at last, on the point of starting, Jacquinet comes running up, and screams out that the grave is not finished yet, but that they can come along, all the same.

Then the priest goes first, reading Latin out of a book. The little clerk who follows him holds an old holy-water vase of embossed copper, into which he has dipped a sprinkler. It is only in the middle of the village that another small boy comes out from the barn where mass is said every fortnight, and puts himself at the head of the procession, holding up a cross on the end of a stick. The family walk behind

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the body; little by little, all the village folk join them; a procession of little ragamuffins, bareheaded, their shirts all unbuttoned, brings up the rear.

The graveyard is at the other end of la Courteille. So the neighbors set down the stretcher three times; they stand puffing, while the funeral waits; then they go on again. You hear the clomping of their wooden shoes on the hard ground. When they get there, the grave, as Jacquinet said, is not ready; the gravedigger is still in it, and you see him duck down, then reappear, at regular intervals, with every shovelful of earth.

A simple hedge runs round the graveyard. Brambles grow there, to which the boys come, of September evenings, to eat blackberries. It is a garden in the open fields. At one end are enormous currant-bushes; a pear-tree in one corner has grown like an oak; a short avenue of lindens casts

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a shade in the middle, where the old men smoke their pipes in summer. The silence is all a-tremble with life; the sap of this rich soil runs red with blood of the poppies.

They have set down the coffin beside the grave. The small boy who carried the cross has planted it at the dead man's feet, while the priest, standing at his head, keeps on reading Latin from his book. But those present are engrossed, above all, with watching the gravedigger at his work. They surround the grave, follow his shovel with their eyes; and, when they turn round, the curé is gone with the two boys; only the family are left waiting patiently.

At last, the grave is dug.

——“It's deep enough, you bet!” cries one of the peasants who carried the body.

And every one helps let down the coffin. Old Lacour can take his comfort in that hole. He knows the soil, and the soil

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knows him. They will get on well together. Here it is sixty years since it made this appointment with him, on the day when he first struck his pickaxe into it. Their love was to end so; the earth was to take him and keep him; and how good a rest! He will hear only the light feet of the birds bending the blades of grass. No one will walk over his head; he will stay at home, without any one's disturbing him. It is sunlit death, sleep without end in the peace of the fields.

His children have drawn near. Catherine, Antoine, Joseph, take a handful of earth and throw it upon the old man. Jacquinet, who has picked some poppies, throws his nosegay, too. Then the family go home to their soup, the cattle come in from the meadows, the sun sets. A warm night puts the village to sleep.

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